DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 359 574 CS 508 212

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TITLE A Case Study of Two Foreign Students: Focus on Language Problems.
PUB DATE 16 Aug 93
NOTE 34p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; *Communication Problems; Communication Research; *Communication Skills; *Coping; *Foreign Students; Graduate Students; Higher Education; *Language Role; *Language Skills; Reading Skills; Second Language Learning; Undergraduate Students
IDENTIFIERS Indiana University Bloomington; Indonesians; Malaysians

ABSTRACT

A case study examined the similarities and differences in the background characteristics, the nature and causes of the English language-based problems, and the coping strategies of two foreign students at Indiana University, Bloomington. Subjects were selected because they represented two different nationalities (Malaysian and Indonesian), genders, age groups, educational levels (graduate and undergraduate), fields of study, and colonial educational backgrounds. Data included responses to a questionnaire, personal interviews, classroom observation,and examination of student essays and lecture notes. Commonalities between the two cases were found in the following areas: speaking the Malay language which is the official language of both Indonesia and Malaysia; positive parental attitude and encouragement about learning English; the reasons for learning English; the nature and causes of English language-based problems; strategies used to overcome language problems and achieve academic success; perceived improvement in academic reading skills; and lack of perceived improvement in verbal and non-verbal communication. The two cases showed some major differences in their personal and academic backgrounds, reasons for learning English, and the amount of English instruction received. In spite of important differences, the language problems of the two cases did not significantly differ. (RS)

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8-16-93

A CASE STUDY OF TWO FOREIGN STUDENTS: FOCUS ON LANGUAGE PROBLEMS

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Introduction:

This case study is an attempt to profile the nature and causes of the English language-based problems and the coping strategies of two foreign students at Indiana University, Bloomington. Through these two case reports, the researcher sought to examine the similarities and differences in the background characteristics, the nature and causes of the English language-based problems and the coping strategies of the two foreign students at Indiana University, Bloomington.

The two case reports are part of a larger study of the English language-based problems of two foreign student groups completed by the researcher in 1991.

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METHODOLOGY

Population:

The two foreign students were chosen from amongst 101 students who responded to a questionnaire initially used by the researcher to identify and analyze the background characteristics and English language-based problems of the Indonesian and Malaysian students enrolled in graduate and undergraduate degree programs at Indiana University, Bloomington, during the spring semester of 1989-90. The survey questionnaire was sent to 47 Indonesian and 92 Malaysian students, two of the largest nationality groups of foreign students attending Indiana University, Bloomington, at the time of data collection.

The Overall Criteria for Selecting the Two Cases:

The subjects for this case study were selected from amongst six students originally selected for collecting qualitative data for the main study. The following overall criteria were used by the researcher in selecting these six students:

(1) The six students would equally represent the two nationality groups.

(2) The subjects from each nationality group must include both genders (at least one must be male and one female).

(3) They were to be students who had already spent a period of time long enough to experience English language-based problems but not long enough to completely overcome these problems. In the researcher's view, such students were those who had spent only one academic year or were in their third semester, and had not yet spent two years at a U.S. university. It was assumed that foreign students in this category were still in the process of adjusting to the U.S. educational system, trying to develop effective academic coping strategies. This decision of the researcher was based on the rationale that students of this category probably had not yet developed as effective academic coping strategies as those who had attended a U.S. university for two academic years or more.

The Specific Criteria for Selecting the Two Cases:

While the above-mentioned overall criteria were applied in selecting the six students for collecting qualitative data for the main study, the following specific rationale was used by the researcher in selecting the two students for the case study. First, the two cases were selected because they represented two different nationalities, genders, age groups, educational levels (graduate and undergraduate), fields of study and, above all, colonial educational backgrounds. Second,

these students were found to be more open-minded and expressive in articulating the nature and causes of their language problems and coping strategies. Finally, they mentioned many of the strategies used by others, so their cases were considered good composites of these strategies.

DATA COLLECTION

Data for the case study were collected through multiple methods: questionnaire, personal interviews, classroom observation and examination of student essays and lecture notes.

To identify the background characteristics and English language-based problems, initial data were collected by sending a questionnaire to the two students. Then, face-to-face interviews were held with the two students. The purpose was two-fold. First, the interviews allowed the two students to reflect further and elaborate on their English language-based problems (already identified through the questionnaire). Second, they enabled the students to speculate on the causes of these problems and describe the coping strategies they found to be effective for their academic success. The questionnaire provided the categories which were used to organize the interview and other qualitative data so that

the latter could provide depth in interpreting the former. However, the questionnaire did not include items to elicit responses to questions concerning the causes of the English language-based problems and the coping strategies. The interview responses provided the sole source of data for the causes of the English language-based problems and the coping strategies used by the students.

Further qualitative data about the two students were collected through observation, and examination of samples of essays and lecture notes. The purpose of the data from observation of the students in their classrooms and examination of samples of their essays and lecture notes was not only to validate the relevant findings already obtained through the questionnaire and substantive personal interviews but also to provide further insights into those findings.

DATA ANALYSIS

The following four steps were used by the researcher to analyze the qualitative data: analysis during data collection; intensive analysis of data; developing categories; and building a theory (Merriam, 1988).

Analysis during Data Collection:

(a) Questionnaire Findings as Leads:

The study's initial findings on the background characteristics and English language-based problems, derived through the survey questionnaire, served as leads for substantive personal interviews, observation of students in their classrooms, and examination of samples of student essays and lecture notes.

(b) Writing Memos:

The researcher wrote memos to himself about what he was learning. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982, p. 149), "Memos can provide a time to reflect on issues raised in the setting and how they relate to larger theoretical, methodological, and substantive issues."

(c) Being Guided by a Question:

While conducting personal interviews, observing students in the classroom and examining samples of essays and lecture notes, the investigator was guided by the following question, "What does this remind me of?" He looked for metaphors, analogies and concepts (some of which were already identified through the literature review and previously collected data) in the data unfolding to him. The purpose was to try, according to Bogdan and Biklen (1982: p. 154), "... to raise concrete relations and happenings observed in a particular setting

to a higher level of abstraction."

(d) Bringing Together All Information about Each Case:

First, in keeping with the questionnaire findings, the data from the transcripts of interviews on each subject were organized by categories/themes. Then, the data from the transcripts of interviews and all other observations about the subject were brought together and organized under the subject's name (including the date of interviewing).

(e) Editing:

The information was edited, redundancies were sorted out, and parts were fitted together.

Intensive Analysis of the Data:

(a) Scanning through Data and Writing Margin Notes:

The data were then scanned several times from beginning to end. While reading, the researcher jotted down his notes, comments, observations, and queries in the margins. The notes served "to isolate the initially most striking ... aspects of the data" (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984, p. 191).

(b) Unitizing:

At this stage of analysis, the researcher identified the "units of information that will ... serve as the

basis for defining categories" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 344).

(c) Using Index Cards:

Each unit of information was put on a separate 3 X 5 index card which was coded according to an aspect of a specific problem. For example, "Failure to write down quickly the major points of a lecture in English" was an aspect of the problem theme "Taking Lecture Notes in English."

3. Developing Categories/Themes:

The researcher determined which index cards were to go with each other, following the "look-alike" or "feel-alike" criteria of Lincoln and Guba (1985). Since the categories/themes were already established, his purpose, at this stage, was to put together the index cards that fell in each of these categories/themes.

The researcher made sure that the categories were not only internally homogeneous (i.e., all items in a single category ought to be similar) but also heterogeneous ((i.e., differences among categories ought to be "bold and clear" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: p. 93)).

4. Developing a Theory:

Here, the researcher established a smaller set of higher level concepts and the analysis moved toward the development of a theory on the English language-based problems of the Indonesian and Malaysian students

studying in an American university. The purpose of this emergent theory was to explain a large number of phenomena and tell how they were related (Merriam, 1988).

The emergent theory in this study was used to determine how well the existing categories/themes (derived from the questionnaire data) were supported by the qualitative data and how well integrated the properties of a category/theme were. More specifically, in order to facilitate the development of a theory, the researcher not only sought to establish a smaller set of higher level concepts about the English language-based problems but also to explain how the causes of the English language-based problems and the coping strategies of the students (in terms of these problems) were related to their present English language-based problems.

Finally, in the main study, the investigator attempted to compare/contrast the findings of the study with previous research and theory. He indicated the outgrowth of previous research and theory and, thereby, demonstrated the contribution this study made to an increased knowledge-base.

The Validity of the Analysis of Qualitative Data:

Internal Validity:

The following measures were taken to ensure the internal validity of the data:

(1) The multiple methods design:

The multiple methods design adopted for the study cross-validated the findings.

(2) Member Check:

The data and their interpretations were taken back to the two subjects who were asked to comment on the plausibility of the results (Merriam, 1988).

(3) Peer Examination:

A doctoral student who was from Indonesia and was conducting a similar study (but on a larger and national scale) on the Indonesian students in the United States was asked to comment on the findings as they emerged.

External Validity:

The following measures were taken to ensure the external validity of the data:

(1) Typicality of the Case:

The typicality of an individual compared with that of the other in the same situation was described so that users of this study could make comparisons with their own situations (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984, cited in Merriam, 1988: 177).

(2) Cross-case Analysis:

Findings were presented first as individual case studies. Then, a cross-case analysis leading to generalizations about what constitutes the background characteristics and English language-based problems of the students was conducted. An interpretation based on evidence from several cases can be more compelling to a reader than results based on a single case (Merriam, 1988). According to Miles and Huberman (1984, cited in Merriam, 1988: 154), "By comparing sites or cases, one can establish the range of generality of a finding or explanation, and at the same time, pin down the conditions under which that finding will occur."

Reliability of the Results Obtained from the Qualitative Data:

The following techniques ensured the consistency and dependability of the results obtained from the qualitative data:

(1) The Investigator's Position:

The investigator's own position in relation to the research topic is a factor that helps establish the reliability of a study's results (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984).

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in Language Education from Indiana University in 1991. He has specialized in English as a Second Language and Literature and taught ESL/EFL courses in various countries of the world. Currently, he is a Reading Instructor at the English Language Center, King Abdul Aziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Like the subjects in the case study presented here, Ali himself entered the U.S. as a foreign student at Indiana University, Bloomington, in January, 1985, and experienced many of the English language-based and cultural problems documented in the main study. As a foreign student, he became interested in studying the English language-based problems of foreign students in the U.S.

Overall, the case study was an attempt by the researcher to document and further develop his understanding of the language-based problems foreign students encounter in studying content-area subjects at a U.S. university.

(2) Triangulation:

The between-methods triangulation design of the study strengthens the reliability of the results of the study.

(3) Audit Trail:

The investigator has described in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry so "that other

researchers can use the original report as an operating manual by which to replicate the study" (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984).

Case Report 1: Lidia

Lidia was a 32-year old graduate student from Indonesia. She was working for a master's degree in Health Science at Indiana University, Bloomington. As an employee of the Indonesian Army Health Services, she was sponsored by the USAID to study a field that was related to her job.

Family Background:

Lidia was born in an Indonesian Catholic family and grew up with her natural parents and only brother.

For her parents, Bahasa Indonesia was the native language and Dutch was the second language. Her father was a psychiatrist, hence, well-educated. Her mother, who was a high school graduate and homemaker, knew several European languages. Her parents, who were educated in the Dutch colonial system and spoke Dutch and Bahasa Indonesia at home most of the time, also knew some English. Her parents used to use some English words and expressions even in their daily conversations in Dutch or Bahasa Indonesia and also read children's story books to

her in English. As Lidia discovered later, they were trying to familiarize her with the English language and also to motivate her to learn English.

Although Lidia picked up Dutch as a second language from her parents, she reported speaking mostly Bahasa Indonesia in her own household with her husband and son. According to her, there was practically no use of Dutch as a second language in her own household. Her husband, due to his family background, had not learned Dutch. He was working for a multinational company in Jakarta and his job involved the use of English for meetings and interactions with foreigners.

Although Lidia thought that she was more proficient in Dutch than in English, she perceived that both she and her husband needed to learn adequate English for training and development in their respective professions.

Learning English in Indonesia:

Lidia had a total of 6 years of formal instruction in English in Indonesia, from grade 8 through the freshman year in college. In grade 8, she had one class session of 45 minutes three times a week. She received English instruction for two hours and a quarter per week. She learned English at this rate for 5 years in junior and senior high schools.

Lidia's English Teachers:

In the school, Lidia was taught English by Indonesian-born teachers of English who used the grammar-translation method.

Lidia's Rationale for Learning English:

Lidia learned English because it was mandatory for her in the junior high school through the freshman year in college. At this stage, she used to think that the only way she would use English would be to read books and materials in English in her leisure time. She discovered the real need for English only when she became interested in getting a higher degree in her field from a U.S. university. This interest strongly motivated her to learn English even beyond her school and college freshman year. For example, she had six months of intensive English from the American-Indonesian Cultural Association in Jakarta after her graduation from college.

Lidia's English Language-based Problems at Indiana University:

Lidia reported that she had problems in vocabulary, informal conversations, fluency and self-expression, pronunciation, understanding American English, understanding classroom lectures, asking questions in the classroom, participation in academic discussions, oral presentation, non-verbal communication, reading a large quantity of materials in a short time, and writing essays.

Causes of Lidia's English Language-based Problems:

Lidia perceived a number of factors to be responsible for her English language-based problems. She reported that she had verbal and non-verbal communication problems because of her lack of familiarity with American expressions, delayed or inappropriate responses for having to think in Bahasa Indonesia and then expressing it in English, lack of self-confidence and feeling nervous, the fast pace of an American professor's lecture, and lack of training and practice in classroom participation (for example, in asking questions and giving oral presentations). She also lacked a systematic method of studying and training and practice in performing large quantities of reading and writing in English. Finally, the interference from the native language in writing English and the wide gap between prior learning condition and the demands of learning at a U.S. university were some other causes of her language problems.

Lidia's Strategies to Cope with Language Problems:

While at Indiana University, Lidia reported that her use of the following strategies helped her overcome her language problems and achieve academic success. She found that talking and discussing language problems with Americans in general and with members of a local Catholic church helped her develop a better self-image. She found

watching TV and listening to the radio to be helpful in improving her English vocabulary and pronunciation.

Her other strategies for general verbal communication included: (1) asking others about English words not known or how to pronounce some English words, (2) describing a whole situation when unable to find the right word or expression, (3) circumlocution, (4) being persistent to explain something, or asking someone to repeat, (5) reading about America, its people and culture, and (6) having a non-Indonesian (i.e., English-speaking) roommate.

Her strategies for coping with classroom lectures, classroom discussions and oral presentations were: (1) borrowing lecture notes from a friend and copying the missing information, (2) writing down a question before articulating it in the classroom, (3) having a friend ask a question to the professor, (4) using a tape-recorder to tape lectures, (5) using audio-visuals for classroom presentation, and (6) talking with a professor in his/her office.

For coping with her reading problems, Lidia found that (1) taking intensive English courses, (2) reading carefully the most important source when there is a long list of readings for a course, (3) skim-reading, (4) using an English-Indonesian dictionary, and (5) using the context to understand the meaning of an English word with

multiple meanings were helpful or effective.

For coping with her academic writing problems, Lidia found the following strategies to be effective: (1) having a paper edited by a friend who had better command of English, (2) getting feedback from the professor on the draft of a paper, and (3) sacrificing everything else in order to finish writing a paper on time.

Lidia had been in the U.S. for about 9 months studying at Indiana University. When asked by the researcher if she had made any significant improvement in her English during the 9-month stay at Indiana University, her modest response was: "Maybe. Particularly, my textbook reading skills have improved. By now, I feel that textbooks in English are easier for me to understand than they were when I first came here. But I still feel I need to further improve my conversational/speaking skills. Speaking English is still a hard thing for me."

The statement suggests perhaps that, although she had initial problems, Lidia was not having much of problems with academic reading and writing at Indiana University any more. It also suggests that she was still facing problems mostly in the areas of verbal and non-verbal communication in general.

In the interviews, Lidia indicated that she was doing well in her courses. How, then, did she achieve her

academic success despite her language problems? What was her strength that led to her achievement in course work? One explanation can be that perhaps her inner drive, self-motivation, self-discipline and hard work coupled with her effective use of study strategies were factors responsible for her success.

Case Report 2: Nizam

Nizam was a 23-year old undergraduate student from Malaysia studying Political Science at Indiana University, Bloomington. He was one of the students sponsored by the Malaysian government. Nizam's native language is Bahasa Malaysia and his second language is English. Nizam viewed English as the second language in bilingual communication at home and in society, the language of learning and verbal and written communication at workplace in his home country.

Family Background:

Nizam was born in a traditional Muslim family and grew up with natural parents and three sisters. His father began his career as a high school teacher of Islamic Studies and retired as an Assistant Director of the Department of Religious Affairs at the Malaysian Ministry of Education. Nizam's mother is a homemaker.

Nizam's parents had a positive attitude toward higher education in general. They took his higher studies in the U.S. as a matter of family pride and were very supportive. Nizam reported that his parents realized the importance of English as a world language and wanted him to make progress in learning it.

Nizam's Rationale for Learning English:

It is to be noted that English is very much a part of the educated Malaysian culture. Educated Malaysians are mostly bilingual and use both Bahasa Malaysia and English. Traditionally, English is used as the second language. English words and expressions come naturally in conversations between two educated Malaysians.

Nizam's rationale for studying political science was to become a Foreign Affairs official for the government of Malaysia. As a prospective government official, he would have to use English for written communication within and outside the administration. English was considered the preferred language of the Malaysian bureaucrats because it is perceived to be more effective than Bahasa Malaysia for official communication. Certain administrative terms in English had no equivalent terms in Bahasa Malaysia. Even if equivalent administrative terms had been introduced into Bahasa Malaysia, the terms were not considered "effective" or "well-established" for bureaucratic communication purposes. Nizam further

observed that the high-ranking bureaucrats in his country's government always spoke English among themselves in their offices. But he also noticed that the same officers spoke Bahasa Malaysia with the low-ranking officers. Since Nizam's goal is to become one of the high-ranking officials of the Malaysian government, he wanted to be "proficient" in English."

Nizam also talked about his own affective reasons for learning English. He thought that learning English made him feel confident and important. He stated, "... knowing English well makes me confident about myself. Knowing good English means I won't have any problem communicating with other people. English is the lingua franca of the world and I must know it. It's the practical importance of English as a world language that motivated me to learn English. Knowing English makes me feel that I'm important, I'm something."

Nizam Sees Practical Use of English for Higher Education:

While studying political science at a university in Malaysia, Nizam realized that English would serve him one practical purpose. He found that textbooks in English were essential for studying political science. He realized that he could not study political science through Bahasa Malaysia because there was a lack of terminology and an acute shortage of political science textbooks in the language. He stated, "Bahasa Malaysia

has not developed the terms and style of writing to present the same political science concepts and theories as I read them in the English language. In conclusion, I must say that I can't pursue higher studies in my field without the knowledge of, and the ability to use, the English language."

As a matter of fact, when he began to study political science, Nizam began with books written in English. He acquired terms and expressions that define concepts, theories and models in political science by reading books written in English, not in Bahasa Malaysia. He stated, "... all I've learned about political science has been through the English language. By now, I'm familiar with the political science concepts in English and I feel comfortable with thinking and reasoning about political science in English. I know most concepts, theories and terms in English. But I haven't learned them in the Malay language."

Also, Nizam stated that, for higher studies in political science, Malaysian students traditionally go to the English-speaking countries of the West. Hence, there was a need for students to know English well.

Learning English in Schools:

Nizam received formal instruction in English for a total of fourteen years and a half, starting in the kindergarten year. Malaysia offers 12 years of schooling.

The schools are divided into kindergarten (1 year), primary (6 years) and high school (5 years). In the kindergarten, he began learning both English and native Bahasa Malaysia. In the primary and high school grades, the medium of instruction was and still is Bahasa Malaysia but English is taught as the second language.

Nizam received one hour of English instruction in the primary school everyday. The main focus of primary school English instruction was on developing reading, grammar and vocabulary skills. The focus of high school English instruction was on developing reading, grammar and writing skills. As far as reading instruction was concerned, the teacher would assign a book, (e.g., a novel) per week. On the following Monday, the classroom teacher would ask students to present their summary on the book and also answer comprehension questions.

Nizam's English Teachers in Schools:

The teachers in Nizam's kindergarten, primary and high schools were all Malaysians. Some of them were trained overseas and some others were graduates of local teacher's colleges.

English Language Training at the Malaysia/Indiana University Cooperative Program at Shah Alam:

Before entering Indiana University, Nizam had received two and a half years of education in the Indiana University project at Shah Alam, Malaysia. The Shah Alam project had offered what he described as a sort of

intensive English to students who were likely to study in the U.S. Nizam's involvement in this preparatory program also gave him some exposure to American culture.

Nizam reported that weekly orientation sessions were held by American staff during the semester prior to coming to the U.S. Discussions were held during the sessions. He described a typical orientation session in the following words, "We had questions and answers. The instructor encouraged us to ask questions about American culture. The instructor used to answer our questions. His response was more elaborate than the answer entailed." The professors also showed videos and slides on high school and college life in the U.S.

Some of the American professors in the preparatory program at Shah Alam encouraged Malaysian students to socialize with their families. Nizam's socialization also included playing basketball with American teenagers. That is how Nizam "learned a little about how they are." On occasions, e.g., on July 4, the professors also invited Nizam to their houses for dinner and to talk about America.

Nizam's instructors in the preparatory program at Shah Alam were all Americans. Nizam perceived that his American teachers were better as far English pronunciation and usage were concerned. He stated, "Especially, for words and expressions that are full of

cultural connotations, the American teachers were better because they had the cultural knowledge behind those words and expressions. The Americans had a better way of expressing themselves in English in certain situations." Speaking of his overall impression of the preparatory program at Shah Alam, Nizam stated, "There I learned a little about how to communicate with them [American professors]. Sometimes I used to go to see them [American professors] in their office[s]. They used to tell me about American life. I saw pictures and posters on the USA. Sometimes they showed me their personal pictures. They helped me form an idea about the USA."

Nizam's Language Problems:

Despite years of learning and using English, Nizam reported having encountered English language-based problems at Indiana University, Bloomington. His major problems were in the areas of verbal communication (particularly, in the classroom), understanding lectures, and academic reading and writing.

More specifically, Nizam encountered problems with (1) English pronunciation, (2) fluency and self-expression, (3) having appropriate words and expressions, (4) initiating a conversation, (5) American English, particularly, colloquial speech of Americans, (6) American culture, (7) jokes and humor in the classroom, (8) asking questions in the classroom, (9) participating

in whole class discussions, (10) communicating with the American professors, (11) being easily understood by, and understanding, the American professor, (12) understanding classroom lectures, (13) taking notes from lectures, (14) presenting and answering questions during an oral presentation, (15) integrating information from multiple sources, (16) reading large quantities of printed materials, (17) reading comprehension, (18) subject-related terminology, (19) English words with multiple meanings, (20) how to start writing a paper, (21) paraphrasing, and (22) writing quickly.

Causes of Nizam's Language Problems:

Nizam perceived that a number of factors were responsible for his English language-based problems at Indiana University, Bloomington. The wide gap between his native and the American cultures is one such cause. His pronunciation and soft, gentle and low voice of speaking were perceived to be one source of his language problems. He perceived that the professor could not clearly hear him when he spoke in the classroom.

Nizam perceived that there were other cultural factors that were responsible for his English language-based problems at Indiana University. Perhaps the most important cause was related to the role of the professor in the teaching/learning process. Nizam described a typical Malaysian professor in the following terms, "It's

always the professor who is talking and handing down knowledge. We just receive it; we don't discuss or ask questions because the professor is the source of knowledge, the authority. Asking him questions may mean questioning his authority in the class. We don't do that. We aren't raised to question. We're raised to show respect to adults including parents and teachers and listening to them passively is our way of showing respect. We think the teacher knows everything about the subject like a father knows everything about what is right and wrong for his children." Besides, says Nizam, the Malaysian teacher did not train students to ask questions or discuss topics critically. He added that "asking questions is not considered [to be] an important part of teaching/learning." Taking tests in which one can demonstrate rote memorization was considered more important in the learning process in Malaysia.

Based on his prior learning in Malaysia, Nizam expected that the teacher in the American classroom would direct him to ask a question by giving the class an assigned time to ask questions at the end of a class session. He found it difficult to take the initiative to ask questions or to quickly perceive the right moment to ask questions because he did not know the sociolinguistic conventions that guide communication in the American classroom.

Nizam further perceived that there was a cultural cause related to his problems of speaking in the classroom. In Malaysia, when someone tried to speak in the classroom, others looked at him, making him nervous. Nizam still felt nervous about speaking in the classroom because other students would be looking at him. That is why he avoided asking questions in the classroom.

Other major perceived causes of Nizam's English language-based problems were: (1) his negative attitude toward his own contribution to a classroom discussion, (2) feeling intimidated about speaking in a whole class discussion, (3) being conscious about his own errors in speaking English, (4) not being used to speaking in front of an audience outside his own national group, (5) poor note-taking and information integration skills, and (6) poor knowledge of English grammar.

Nizam's Strategies to Overcome His Language Problems:

Nizam used a number of strategies in an effort to overcome his language problems and achieve academic success. To overcome problems with general verbal communication, he used strategies such as (1) trying to express himself in many ways, (2) repetition, (3) asking someone to provide a word or expression in classroom communication, (4) applying the same communication strategies to Americans as he did to fellow Malaysians, (5) avoiding a prolonged conversation, (6) asking an

American speaker to speak slowly.

To overcome problems with lectures and classroom performance, Nizam's strategies were: (1) having an ally in the class, (2) borrowing notes from someone, (3) writing the missing information when the professor reviewed his lecture at the end, (4) writing notes when other students wrote notes, (5) talking with the professor in his office and taking notes when he was unable to elaborate a question or did not understand something, and (6) finding out from fellow students about which professors would be accessible and empathetic and explaining his difficulty to participate or ask questions to him.

Nizam's strategies of dealing with academic reading problems included: postponing reading when an assigned text was hard to understand and reading it after the next lecture which covered the information in a text.

To cope with his problems of academic writing, Nizam found the use of the following strategies to be effective: (1) forcing himself to start writing, (2) ignoring other things and devoting all his time to writing, (3) staying up all night in order to finish writing a paper, (4) looking up an English grammar for grammatical errors or asked a Malaysian roommate proficient in English, (5) reading outside materials to improve English vocabulary, and (6) explaining his

difficulty with writing English to a sympathetic professor.

Nizam perceived himself to have made some improvement in reading subject-related books and materials in English. He stated, "I've no problem reading political science textbooks in English. At the beginning, I used to feel intimidated by a thick textbook in English. But as a result of my continuous and persistent learning of English, I don't feel the same way when I see a thick political science book in the English language. Over the years, I've improved my ability to read and comprehend texts in English."

Although Nizam was resorting to a wide range of coping strategies and believed himself to be academically successful, he still needed to improve his English, especially, in verbal and non-verbal communication, participation in whole class discussions, asking questions, taking lecture notes, understanding lectures and academic writing in general.

Comparison and Contrast between the Two Cases:

In terms of their family and academic backgrounds and the nature and causes of the language problems and the coping strategies employed, the two cases showed similarities as well as differences.

Similarities:

Commonalities between the two cases were found in the following areas: speaking the Malay language which is the official language of both Indonesia and Malaysia; positive parental attitude and encouragement about learning English; the reasons for learning English; the nature and causes of English language-based problems; strategies used to overcome language problems and achieve academic success; perceived improvement in academic reading skills; and lack of perceived improvement in verbal and non-verbal communication.

Differences:

The two cases showed some major differences in their personal and academic backgrounds, reasons for learning English and the amount of English instruction received. Some examples of the differences between the two cases follow.

The two cases represented different nationalities, genders, ages, marital statuses, fields of study and educational levels. In terms of the rationale for learning English, Nizam learned English with the conscious decision to specialize in his major field (political science) through the medium of English. His professional goal was to study political science in order to become a high-ranking official in the government of Malaysia. He perceived English to be the preferred

language and the language of prestige for verbal and written communication in the Malaysian bureaucracy and essential for higher studies in political science.

Therefore, Nizam had consciously begun learning political science through English and acquired knowledge of related concepts, theories and models through English before entering Indiana University. On the other hand, Lidia was not sure as to how she could use English when she had begun learning it. She perceived that she learned English only because it was mandatory for her in the school and college freshman years. She studied her major (psychology) in Indonesia through her native language (Bahasa Indonesia).

As far as the amount of English instruction was concerned, Nizam learned English for a total of fourteen years and a half. He received English instruction from kindergarten through grade 12 for an average of one hour for five days a week in the Malaysian school system. On the other hand, Lidia learned English for a total of six years and a half. She received English instruction from grade 8 through 12 for 45 minutes a day for 3 days a week in the Indonesian school system.

Conclusion:

In spite of these important differences in the personal and academic backgrounds, the language problems of the two cases did not significantly differ. Lidia, due

to her shorter exposure to the English language, was expected to have more language problems than Nizam. But that was not the case. What could be the reasons?

Lidia's case suggests perhaps that English is becoming more important in Indonesia for study abroad and workplace communication. For example, her husband's employers stressed that he had to know English well in order to communicate effectively at the workplace. Therefore, the data from Lidia suggest a new trend in the functional need for learning English in Indonesia. This trend, along with the motivation while studying in the U.S., suggests the importance of some factors that can influence one's attitude toward, and involvement in, learning English as a foreign language over time.